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Articles in Today's Clips Friday, December 7, 2007

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COULD YOU HAVE SAVED RICKY?

Chapter 6: Ricky's gone!

December 7, 2007

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Sixth of 14 parts

Tim and Lisa Holland's phone rang just before 9 a.m. It was July 2, 2005, and Arcie Holland, Tim's mother, was calling from DeWitt. Ricky was coming to stay for a few days on the Fourth, and she wanted to remind Tim to send enough clothes so she wouldn't have to do laundry.

Advertisement

Tim asked her if she wanted to talk to Ricky. He was still asleep, Tim said, but he could put the phone by Ricky's ear so she could yell at him to wake him. Arcie listened as Tim walked to Ricky's bedroom with the phone. Then she heard Tim bellow:

"Ricky's gone! Ricky's gone! I've got to find him!"

Tim hung up and called 911 to report that his son had climbed out the window and run away. It was 9:35 a.m. An Ingham County sheriff's deputy arrived less than 25 minutes later. Lisa was gone, having left early that morning to go shopping with her mother in Lansing.

Tim showed the deputy Ricky's first-floor bedroom. The bed was pushed under a sliding window, and the window and screen were open about 8 inches. Ricky must have used the bed to climb out onto the front porch. He'd done it before, Tim said -- once in May when he went to a neighbor's house and just two weeks earlier when he hid in pine trees at the entrance to their subdivision just outside Williamston.

Tim said Ricky wasn't well mentally or emotionally and was taking medications for several disorders. He also suggested that Ricky's birth mother might have kidnapped him.

Tim called Lisa's cell phone to break the news about Ricky, and when she came home, the deputy asked her to type up a sheet with Ricky's description. Tim pulled out a photo while Lisa put together a flyer on the computer and printed out copies.

The deputy called dispatch and issued a lookout alert for the 7-year-old, described as weighing 55 pounds and standing 3 1/2 feet tall. Before dusting the bedroom window and screen for prints, he requested backup from Williamston police and help from a tracking dog unit.

Within an hour, a Michigan State University officer arrived with her dog. They tried for hours but couldn't pick up a trail. At the sheriff's headquarters in Mason, a program called a Child Is Missing was initiated, sending recorded messages to listed phone numbers in the area to watch for the boy.

Search comes up empty

About 11:30 a.m., a deputy called Tim with more questions.

Were there any phone calls to or from the house the previous evening?

No, but you can check the caller ID on our phone, Tim said.

Was there an issue of discipline or a family problem that might have led Ricky to run away?

Yes, there was. Last night, Ricky had been disciplined after he slapped his 2 1/2 -year-old sister. He got a 6-minute time-out, then "went to bed mad," telling his father, "I hate you."

Tim again mentioned Ricky's medications.

The sheriff's department set up a mobile command post on Grand River, around the corner from the Hollands' house on Douglas Street in Leroy Township, and the family left so deputies could search the house.

As the sun set, Sheriff's Lt. Jeff Cook and Maj. Allan Spyke briefed the Hollands. The ground search was suspended until morning, but police would continue looking from their vehicles through the night. Officers wouldn't patrol the Hollands' street, so as not to scare away the boy.

Spyke asked the Hollands to leave the house unlocked and the porch light on, so Ricky could easily get in if he returned.

"At no time during this conversation did the Hollands express any type of emotion," Spyke later noted.

As Cook and Spyke were leaving, someone from Camp Pa-Wa-Pi, a 52-acre day camp in Williamston operated by the Lansing YMCA, walked up and said he had found a flashlight and blue hairbrush while searching the grounds for Ricky.

Cook turned toward the Hollands, who were standing on their porch about 30 feet away, held up the hairbrush and asked whether it might be Ricky's. Tim said it was. But later that evening, Tim and Lisa went to the command center and examined it more closely. Tim remained convinced it was Ricky's; Lisa wasn't sure.

Investigators question Hollands ...

Sheriff's Sgt. Roy Holliday and Detective Paul Nieuwsma went to the Hollands' the next morning. They were now heading the investigation. Next to finding Ricky, their goal was to get a read on the Hollands.

Holliday interviewed Lisa in one of the kids' bedrooms; Nieuwsma talked with Tim in the living room.

Lisa told Holliday how, after dinner, Ricky hit his sister after she ran into him and was given a time-out for 6 or 7 minutes at the kitchen table. Then they watched "The Pacifier," a Vin Diesel comedy, on TV. Ricky laughed during the movie, Lisa said, but when they told him to go to bed between 9 and 10 p.m., he got angry. Ricky told them, "I still hate you," Lisa said.

Nothing else of importance happened, she said. She left about 8:20 the next morning to take her mother shopping and didn't know Ricky was missing until Tim called her cell phone.

Would anyone want to kidnap her son?

Lisa didn't think so, though she also brought up his birth mother. The adoption had been "nasty," Lisa said, and Ricky had hitchhiked across the country with his mother as a 2-year-old, sleeping on the ground and eating out of garbage cans.

Lisa said she had to pull Ricky out of school to home-

school him because he kept stealing food from other kids, implying this was a behavior he learned on the road. And, she said, he was on medications to mellow him out.

Holliday asked if Ricky had any friends; Lisa said they were new to the neighborhood and "Ricky had no friends."

Holliday asked Lisa if she would take a polygraph test. She wondered if that meant she was a suspect. The detective said the test would help rule her out, and she agreed to it.

... and they seem almost too calm

Tim's statement was nearly identical to Lisa's, except that he said Ricky's time-out was spent sitting at the fireplace.

"Ricky is very streetwise and is very self-sufficient and independent," Tim told Nieuwsma. He gave the detective phone numbers for Ricky's foster care worker and pediatrician in Jackson.

But now, Tim altered his story about Ricky's medications, saying he'd stopped them about six months before because they turned Ricky into a zombie. Ricky's behavior was worse when Tim was out of town for military training, he said.

Did he have any reason to suspect the boy was being abused in their home? Certainly not, Tim said.

Would Tim take a polygraph test? Yes, he replied.

That afternoon, Lansing TV station WILX (Channel 10) arrived to interview Tim and Lisa, who pleaded for their son's safe return. Lisa clung to Tim's arm and buried her face in his shoulder.

And later that day, Tim and Lisa were driven to the Michigan State Police complex in Lansing. Lisa's polygraph was inconclusive, meaning the examiner couldn't determine whether she was being truthful. Tim's examiner indicated he was truthful "in his answers in relation to Ricky Holland's status or knowledge of Ricky Holland's whereabouts."

Though the detectives saw a few discrepancies in the Hollands' stories, they were more troubled by something else: The Hollands just weren't acting like the parents of a missing child.

SATURDAY: Suspects and lies.

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or jkresnak@freepress.com.

[Chapter 5: A boy on a leash](#)

Chapter 7: Suspects and lies

Find this article at:

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Detroit Free Press

December 7, 2007

Amber alerts

An Amber Alert for Ricky was issued at 2 a.m. July 3, 2005, and wasn't canceled until Ricky's body was found more than six months later.

The alert was one of 42 involving 47 missing children issued that year in Michigan. All of the children were found unharmed except for Ricky and a 5-year-old Jackson County girl who accidentally drowned.

Amber Alert is a volunteer effort among State Police, local police agencies and Michigan broadcasters. The idea is to get the word out quickly because children who are kidnapped generally are harmed within three hours, said Michigan State Police Sgt. Greg Jones, the program's coordinator.

"We've had several cases in Michigan where the public has taken action because of the Amber Alert and children were recovered safely," he said.

Article published Dec 7, 2007

Jarvis: Just trying to help

Trace Christenson

The Enquirer

Ruthann Jarvis, charged with the September murder of 5-month-old Damien Lewis, told police she was just trying to help.

"She said he had been up since 3:30 a.m. and she knew he was teething and not sleeping and she wanted to help," Springfield Public Safety Officer Kevin Callahan testified Thursday.

So Jarvis told the officer she picked up a tablet of the adult sleep aid Ambien and placed it between the child's cheek and gum.

"After feeding the child she saw one of the Ambien tablets on the microwave and picked it up and put it in Damien's mouth," Callahan said.

Jarvis put Damien in a crib at her Springfield daycare center but a few minutes later found he was not breathing and, despite her attempts at CPR, he was pronounced dead at Battle Creek Health System.

Callahan was the first witness in the preliminary examination before Calhoun County District Judge Marvin Ratner. The hearing is to determine if Jarvis, 48, will stand trial in the case.

Prosecutors are seeking charges of felony murder and first-degree child abuse. If convicted she faces a mandatory sentence of life in prison without parole.

Ratner heard testimony from two witnesses but asked prosecutors Jeff Kabot and Daniel Buscher, and defense attorney Ronald Pichlik to submit written briefs before he rules in the case. A decision is expected later this month or in early January.

Callahan said he interviewed Jarvis several times after the child died Sept. 26 at the licensed in-home day care at 31 Greenbriar Lane, where five children were enrolled.

Only on Oct. 30, after an autopsy showed the child had high levels of Ambien, did Jarvis explain what happened, Callahan said.

She told the officer another parent had given her a sample package of the prescription drug.

Dr. Michael Markey, a pathologist, testified that tests showed the child had 378 nanograms per milliliter of blood of the drug Ambien, also known by its generic name of Zolpidem, in his system. A single dose for an adult would result in 50 to 60 nanograms per milliliter, he said.

Markey said the sleeping tablet is designed to act quickly and the child died of acute Zolpidem intoxication poisoning.

Jarvis remains in the county jail; her bond set at \$200,000.

Trace Christenson can be reached at 966-0685 or tchrist@battlecr.gannett.com.

DETROIT

Shot girl inspires outpouring of concern

December 7, 2007

BY M.L. ELRICK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

The almost unimaginable courage of a young girl shot while trying to save her mother is inspiring Free Press readers to open their hearts -- and their wallets.

Since her story appeared in Wednesday's paper, readers have called and sent e-mails asking how they can help Alexis Goggins and her mother, Selietha Parker.

Advertisement

"You mentioned that the Parker's furnace was out," wrote one reader. "Is there any way that I could send her a Christmas gift, or a small financial donation if the family needs it? ... I myself am a student and so I don't have a lot to offer. However ... no child should have to suffer and certainly not one who has demonstrated what a noble and courageous girl she is."

In response to the outpouring of concern, Alexis' school, Campbell Elementary in Detroit, has established a fund to collect contributions.

Detroit police hailed Alexis' valor after she was shot several times early Sunday morning.

She is scheduled to undergo surgery today. Her mother was shot twice and has been released from the hospital.

Police said Parker's former boyfriend, Kelvin (Bird) Tillie, abducted and shot them.

Tillie, a 29-year-old ex-con out on parole, was charged with several felonies, including assault with intent to commit murder. He is being held in the Wayne County Jail without bail.

Alexis reportedly lunged at Tillie after he shot her mother as they sat in a Ford Expedition at a gas station on the city's east side.

"She said 'Don't hurt my mother,' and jumped in the front seat," Parker told Local 4's Silva Harapetian on Thursday.

Still unable to speak, Alexis lost her right eye. She is expected to live, but school attendance officer Marvin Bodley said doctors won't know about her quality of life until she undergoes more operations.

"Just keep us in your prayers," Caroline Williams, Alexis' cousin, said.

*To send a card or contribution, contact the Alexis Goggins Hero Fund, c/o Comerica Bank, Campbell Elementary School, 2301 E. Alexandrine, Detroit 48207. Contact **M.L. ELRICK** at 313-222-6582 or mlelrick@freepress.com.*

The County Press

Love brought large blended family together

by JENNIFER DECKER
STAFF REPORTER

For Mike and Barb McDonald, having children was not about the physical space in their home, but the expanse of love in their heart.

The large Lapeer family includes Mike and Barb and their nine children: Danielle, 21; Bree, 8; Mariah, 10; Ryan, 19; Samantha, 16; Chelsea, 15, Desiree, 13; Makayla, 12; and Kaleb, 8. All of the children are adopted except Ryan and Desiree who are birth children.

"We thought we'd adopt one and then we fell in love with them," Barb said. "There's never a quiet moment. I'm thankful to have the kids in my life."

The school-aged children all attend Lapeer East High School except Kaleb, who attends the Michigan School for the Deaf in Flint.

The big family came about through Barb and Mike's service as foster parents to 75-100 children over the years and seven of their nine children came up for adoption through the foster system. It helped that Barb works for Catholic Charities as a child welfare specialist. One child, Kaleb, has Down Syndrome, and Barb is president of Special Parents Initiative for Down Syndrome Education and Resources (SPIDER).

Though some may look upon Barb and Mike's blended family as a challenge, Barb said she only sees the blessings that have come into all their lives by becoming a family. The fact most of her children were older when they got adopted helped in terms of them relating to each other and as a family. Barb said Makayla was 5, Samantha was 8, Bree was 11, Mariah was 13, and Danielle was 14. Kaleb is the only exception as he was 11/2.

"We adopted Kaleb as a baby," Mike said. "When he was born he was drug addicted, deaf, epileptic, had Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and had Down Syndrome."

To communicate with Kaleb, everyone in the family knows American Sign Language.

Because they all look different (Makayla and Chelsea are also black) Mike said the family is sometimes questioned about each individual's heritage, but they ignore curiosity seekers. Race is irrelevant — it's the fact they're the McDonald family that matters most, he said.

Mike said Kaleb is at an age where he's discovering his skin color is different from others around him. "He just started noticing he's black," Mike said. "We don't teach any difference. We talk about slavery, civil rights. We've never hidden anything from them."

Six of the children came into the family through closed adoptions.

Samantha said she was 7 when she got adopted. "It feels good to be set somewhere permanently and to have someone love you," she said. "Some days it's a hassle," she joked, "but other days we hang out and have fun."

Samantha knows her birth family and said she might be interested in meeting with them in the future.

Chelsea, who was adopted at age 5 or 6, said she's aware her family is larger than many, but likes that there's always noise and something to do. "When I want to be alone and read I can go to the library or living room."

"The adoption was good," Chelsea said. "I remember coming to the house and staying. The judge asked if I wanted to be adopted by the McDonalds and Ryan (her sibling) was nodding and we took pictures."

Samantha was quick to point out each child is an individual in the family with their own likes and dislikes. Makalya likes doing homework and learning and wants to pursue a job as a social worker. Kaleb hopes to work in a toy store one day, while Mariah's favorite hobby is horseback riding. She'd like to eventually become an auto mechanic.

Christmas is huge at the McDonald house and the entire family gets involved in holiday preparations. "We switch each year with one year the youngest opens presents first and the next year we start with the oldest," Makalya said.

Samantha said the presents are numbered so that they can be a surprise.

"One year we wrapped the presents all in the same paper," Mike said and laughed.

Desiree said there's a pile of presents for each family member at Christmas. She said she welcomed the addition of her brothers and sisters to her family. "The adoption was really cool," Desiree said. "It was all those faces fitting in, but we helped them and we built relationships. Everyone was in this home as a foster kid. First it was hectic, then it was normal, but it's always been OK."

Keeping up with the running of the house is a chore the family shares. Weekly, they do more than 15 loads of laundry. The family's grocery bill is usually \$200 each week and they get around in a 15-passenger van.

But the most important thing in any family is not its size but the amount of love that goes around, Mike said.

"Adoption is a blessing," Barb said.

The couple believes each member of their family is special and hopes others considering adoption take differences in children out of the equation when bringing a new person into their home.

"I hope people will give kids with special needs and older children a chance," Barb said. "To adopt you can be single, a bi-racial couple, or cross racial. We do a ton of interviewing before adopting."

Mike said there's plenty of children in the Pontiac area aching for a home and family to adopt them. "You see so many kids and you can only take in so many. Most of them are black kids from impoverished families."

For more information on adoptions, call Barb at the Catholic Charities of Shiawassee and Genesee counties at (810) 232-9950.

Jennifer Decker can be reached at (810) 664-0811, Ext. 8125 or jennifer.decker@lapeergroup.com.

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Foster mother of 45 gets help in time of need

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Friday, December 07, 2007

By Holly Klaft

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MONTROSE TWP. - As a foster parent who has raised 45 children in the past decade, Roberta Smith always has been the one to do all the giving.

But when medical bills started piling up after she was diagnosed with a serious bone marrow disorder, her friends and family pitched in to alleviate the financial burden.

"There's nothing I can do for her physically," said Bonnie Matzke, 42, who is organizing a Dec. 29 fundraiser at the Montrose Eagles Club for her ailing sister. "The medical bills are just piling in. She's so depressed with it all, and this gave her a bright spot."

The idea of receiving financial help initially was difficult to accept, said Smith, 55, of Burt.

"I never expected I would ever need anything like this," said Smith, a mother of nine who still has six adopted children living at home. "I've always been the giving person."

But it isn't the first generous offer Smith has received during her illness.

Three of her adopted sons offered their organs earlier this year when Smith's kidney disease progressed to the point she needed a transplant.

"Both of mine work fine, and I don't need them both," said Smith's son, Michael, 17, who came to her home as a foster child when he was 9 and offered to donate a kidney but was considered too young. "I'd much rather have her here than not."

Smith's adopted son, Christopher, 19, proved to be a match, but her bone marrow disorder prevented her from receiving the transplant.

Still, the offers will always be overwhelming for Smith.

"It was unreal," she said. "I cried and cried. I couldn't believe they would want to do it, not being my own children."

Smith has two adult biological daughters and adopted seven of her former foster children.

Her adopted sons have been boosting efforts to take care of her and their home, even calling to check on her during breaks at school, she said.

Now they'll also be an integral part of planning the fundraiser.

QUICK TAKE

How to help

Bonnie Smith of Burt, a mother of nine who also has served as a foster mother for dozens of children, has been battling bone marrow disease myelofibrosis and kidney problems.

A fundraiser for her will be held at 2 p.m. Dec. 29 at the Eagles Club, 11416 W. Vienna Road, Montrose Township. The event will include dinner, a 50-50 raffle and an auction.

Details: Bonnie Matzke, (810) 625-3262.

"It'll take a lot of the worry away," Michael said.

With a few weeks left to plan the event, Matzke said she's worried about having enough space to accommodate all the family, friends and dozens of former foster children who may attend.

"She's always loved kids. She can't stand to turn any of them loose," said Matzke, of Montrose. "With her kids and our family, it's a lot."

The fundraiser, which will include dinner, a 50-50 raffle and an auction, is set for 2 p.m. Dec. 29 at the Eagles Club, 11416 W. Vienna Road.

For information on donating to the fundraiser or attending, call Matzke at (810) 625-3262.

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DETROIT

Aide's wife: 'Get police here now!'

December 7, 2007

BY ZACHARY GORCHOW

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A frightened Tania Allen pleaded with a 911 operator to "Get the police here now!" when she called to report that her husband, Detroit mayoral press secretary Matt Allen, had attacked her.

"I've just been assaulted by my husband," she told the 911 operator, according to tapes released Thursday. "He's drunk. He just broke the bathroom window breaking my head up to the window. Get the police here now! Get the police here now!"

Advertisement

Matt Allen, 42, pleaded guilty Monday to misdemeanor charges of domestic violence and attempted resisting and obstructing a police officer in the Nov. 2 incident at the couple's Indian Village home.

He was sentenced to one year of probation on the domestic violence charge; the attempted resisting and obstructing a police officer charge was taken under advisement. If Allen keeps to the terms of his probation, that charge will be dismissed.

The city has said his employment status remains unchanged.

So upset was Tania Allen during the call that she kept repeating her address as the operator asked questions. The operator said, "Ma'am, answer my question, OK! You want some help, answer my question!"

Tania Allen placed a second call about 20 minutes after her first one, wondering when police would arrive. By then, she sounded less stressed and said she was across the street.

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Friday, December 7, 2007

Mayor aide's wife: 'Get police here now'

The Detroit News

DETROIT -- Tania Allen, wife of Detroit mayoral spokesman Matt Allen, frantically asked a 911 operator to "Get the police here now!" following an early morning altercation last month, according to tapes released Thursday.

"I've just been assaulted by my husband. He is drunk," Allen was recorded as saying, in tapes obtained by WXYZ TV (Channel 7). "He just broke the bathroom window. Banged my head up to the window. I have a 16-month-old baby is (sic) in the house.

"I am across the street. He ripped off my pajamas. He broke out the window. ... Look, he rammed my head into the glass bathroom window."

Allen pleaded guilty Monday to two misdemeanor charges of domestic violence as well as attempted resisting and obstructing police before 36th District Judge June Carter rather than face further public scrutiny at a preliminary examination Dec. 13.

The domestic violence charge carries a maximum penalty of 93 days in jail.

Carter placed Allen on probation for one year and ordered him to attend 26 weeks of batterer's counseling as well as a psychiatric evaluation. He was ordered to continue substance abuse treatment until he is medically discharged, and must also remain drug and alcohol free with random testing, attend parenting classes and have no threatening contact with his wife.

The case stemmed from a police call to the Allen home on Seminole at 2:30 a.m. Nov. 2, shortly after Allen had returned from a press party that night.

Police records showed the incident was the second one to which police were called to the couple's Indian Village home.

On Monday, spokesman James Canning said Allen still was employed.

After his arrest and initial court appearance last month, Allen made a tearful public apology, acknowledged he had a problem and said he was checking himself into a treatment facility.

Attorney Neil Rockind released a statement on behalf of Tania Allen: "The past few weeks have been very difficult for our family. I understand that for many in the media, my husband's struggles are newsworthy events. In the process, my family's needs seem to get lost. Please understand that this process impacts upon others -- me, my children and other members of our family. That is why we ask that the media please respect our privacy."

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<http://www.detnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/artikkel?Dato=20071207&Kategori=METRO&Lopenr=712070411&Ref=AR>

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Boyfriend to stand trial for torture

Woman testifies he beat her over 7-hour period

By Norb Franz

Macomb Daily Staff Writer

A Warren woman on Thursday tearfully testified that her boyfriend stabbed and repeatedly punched and kicked her for about seven hours, leaving her bloodied and fearing for her life.

When she complained of dizziness, the injured 27-year-old woman feared the man -- who is the father of her 3-year-old son -- would kill her, according to testimony during a preliminary court hearing for the suspect, Marco Deangelo Grant.

"He said if I passed out he would put my body in a bag and throw me in the river," she said.

Grant, 25, faces several felony charges, including torture and assault with intent to murder, for the Sept. 24 incident at the woman's home in the Center Line Gardens Apartments on Mound Road.

The Macomb Daily currently is not publishing the woman's name.

At Grant's preliminary exam in 37th District Court, she said he became angry about phone numbers he found on her cellular phone. She testified that after she downplayed the numbers, Grant told her she must "pay" and he assaulted her with a steak knife. One of her fingers was severely cut as she tried to shield her head.

When she screamed, he put a pillow on her face, suffocating her, she said.

"I prayed to God to take care of my son," the woman cried before visiting Judge Sherman Faunce.

She accused Grant of stomping her, hitting her in the head with a wooden brush approximately 100 times and also with a glass liquor bottle, pulling her by the hair, dousing her with peroxide and booze and attempting to set her on fire by lighting pieces of paper tossed on her.

During the alleged attack, their 3-year-old son was upstairs.

"My son got up, and (Grant) told him to go back to bed because he was going to kill me," she said.

During the incident, Grant spoke on his cellular phone to at least two other

women, telling them she was bloodied. He allegedly removed her shirt and bra.

"He told me he was going to cut my nipples off," she said. Instead, he stabbed her in the knee, the Warren woman said. He also is accused of urinating on her.

After Grant fell asleep on the couch, the injured woman got other clothes and grabbed her son, she said. Swollen, bloodied and with a 2-inch clump of hair missing from her head, she drove to the home of a friend who didn't answer. Unwilling to drive to her mother's home -- "I didn't want my momma to see me like that" - she borrowed a phone from a pedestrian, phoned her mother and went to St. John Hospital in Detroit for treatment.

Under cross-examination by defense attorney Kenneth Vernier, she said she refrained from screaming during the attack because she feared the violence would worsen. She explained she did phone police after leaving the apartment because the allotted minutes on her cellular phone had expired.

Warren police officer Todd Murray said officers who entered the apartment through the unlocked rear door spotted Grant sleeping on the couch. When they tried to arrest him, he stiffened his arms until officers wrestled him to the floor and managed to handcuff him, Murray said.

In addition to the charges of torture and trying to kill the Warren woman, Grant faces charges of unlawful imprisonment, assault with intent to do great bodily harm less than murder, assault with a dangerous weapon, interfering with a crime report and resisting police. Faunce ordered Grant to stand trial in Macomb County Circuit Court.

Jennifer Andary, chief of the domestic violence unit at the Macomb County Prosecutor's Office, said officials believe the woman's claims that Grant had previously abused her although she did not file police reports.

"Ultimately it gets to something of this extreme where someone has endured sadistic behavior," Andary said.

Vernier declined comment after Thursday's hearing, but in challenging whether the woman's testimony warranted some of the felony charges, he said: "Mr. Grant will have his opportunity before a jury to decide if she is telling the truth."

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ClickOnDetroit.com

Man Facing Felony Charges Of Torture, Unlawful Imprisonment

POSTED: 1:15 pm EST November 30, 2007
UPDATED: 7:45 pm EST December 6, 2007

A Warren man faces felony charges of torture, unlawful imprisonment and assault with intent to commit murder after police said abused her 27-year-old girlfriend.

Marco Deangelo Grant, 25, is accused of torturing his girlfriend for more than eight hours and nearly setting her on fire.

The couple from Warren has a 3-year-old son and a four-year history of domestic violence.

Back on Sept. 23 and into early the 24th, police said the woman was beaten, cut with a knife, hit with glass bottles and doused in rum and hydrogen peroxide.

"He started taking pieces of paper out of his book, and lighting them and throwing them on me," the victim said in a courtroom.

Police also said the woman waited an hour until her attacker was asleep before she took her son and left out a back door of her apartment in the Center Line Gardens Apartments.

The woman drove to her mother's house in Detroit and was later treated at the hospital.

"Had she not escaped after he fell asleep, she might not have survived," said Macomb County assistant prosecutor Steve Kaplan in the Macomb Daily.

The Daily reported that the incident began when Grant found telephone numbers of other men on the woman's cell phone. The paper also reported that the woman told police her attacker repeatedly placed a pillow over her face to silence her, and told her he would dump her body in the Detroit River if she didn't calm down.

"He told me if I passed out, he was going to put my body in a bag and throw me in the river," the victim said.

The woman also told police her son had been witness to some of the beating.

According to Warren Detective Cpl. Daniel Klik, police have obtained phone records that could prove Grant made calls to friends describing the attack.

Grant, sleeping in the apartment, was arrested by police and remains in the Macomb County Jail with a \$2 million bond.

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Article published Dec 7, 2007

Jury finds Pratt guilty on all counts

Trace Christenson

The Enquirer

Christopher Pratt sat quietly as a jury announced Thursday he was guilty of domestic violence and assault.

"He was quiet and disappointed," his attorney, J. Thomas Schaeffer, said later. "I am very disappointed."

The jury of six men and six women concluded their deliberations about 10 a.m. Thursday, finding Pratt, 39, guilty of domestic violence, felonious assault, interfering with a communications device and unlawful imprisonment.

The jury deliberated 41/2 hours over two days following six days of trial in Calhoun County Circuit Court.

"The issue for the jury was who you believe," Chief Assistant Prosecutor Dan Buscher said after the verdict, "and they believed her. There were just too many holes in his story."

Pratt was charged with assaulting his girlfriend, Norreen Parker, 35, with a chair at their Fredonia Township home on June 24. He also was charged with destroying the telephone to prevent her from calling for help and preventing her from leaving the house while he fled from police.

Parker testified Pratt threw a chair, hitting her in the legs, during an argument. She told the jury he was frequently verbally and physically abusive during their 18-month relationship.

But Pratt testified he still loved Parker and never assaulted her. He said he was angry the day of the incident because she continued to accuse him of seeing other women but that, while he knocked over chairs, a microwave oven and pulled down a rack from the wall, he never hurt her.

He now faces up to 15 years in prison when he is sentenced Jan. 7 by Judge Stephen Miller. Miller revoked bond and Pratt, who has been locked up since he was arrested the same day as the assault, will remain in the county jail.

Pratt is a person of interest in the March 2004 disappearance of Mary Marshall Lands, 39. He was engaged and living with her in Marshall when she disappeared.

He told Marshall police she walked out of their condo after an argument and had nothing to do with her disappearance. She has not been seen since and no one has been arrested in the case.

Lands' parents, who believe Pratt is responsible for the disappearance of their daughter, attended the trial.

"This is all about Norreen," Lands' father, Clifford Marshall, said after the verdict. "This is a giant step for Norreen and a small step for Mary.

"Prison will be a good place for him and it makes the streets of Marshall a lot safer."

Marshall said he believes testimony from Parker and Pratt's former wife, Susan Harrington, about the abuse they suffered from Pratt is identical to what their daughter endured.

"Everything he did to those two ladies he did to our daughter," Marshall said. "We will be back for the sentencing. I wouldn't miss that for nothing."

Pratt's family, including his mother, declined comment after the verdict.

Schaeffer said after talking with two jurors he didn't believe they understood the law, which applied to the unlawful imprisonment.

"And their decision is against the great weight of the evidence," he said.

But Buscher, who talked to the same two jurors as Schaeffer and also two others, said jurors did understand the charges and what was required to convict Pratt.

"They had a clear understanding," he said. "They believed he knew the police were coming over and he had to get out of the house."

Parker testified that Pratt prevented her from leaving the house and then threw her car keys into the yard. Pratt testified he threw the keys trying to force Parker to leave more quickly.

Jurors declined comment to the Enquirer.

Both Buscher and Schaeffer said it doesn't appear the jurors knew the connection between Pratt and the Lands case, which was not mentioned to the jury during the trial.

"They knew there were a lot of discussions about the evidence," Buscher said, "but they said the issue never came up during deliberations."

"They were wondering about what was the information that they couldn't hear," Schaeffer said. "They were curious about the missing information."

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DETROIT

Homeless vets get new chance at Hope House

December 7, 2007

BY JOE ROSSITER

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

In memory of the anniversary of Pearl Harbor, a local pastor and members of his congregation are showing their appreciation today by offering hope to homeless veterans.

A grand opening for the newly renovated Detroit residence -- known as Hope House -- is set for 2 p.m. today at the home, 14626 Mansfield, on the city's west side.

Advertisement

"We want to repay the veterans who have done so much to allow us the freedoms that we enjoy today," said Pastor Leon Crawford Jr., 41, of the Uniting Faith and Family Outreach in Detroit.

Up to eight people can be accommodated at the four-bedroom home, which has hardwood floors, a fireplace, a two-car garage and a large backyard.

Residents who live there will be supervised by church personnel and will be expected to help with cooking, cleaning and other household chores. In addition, they will need to find jobs or perform community volunteer work while living in the home.

Crawford said that residents who apply to live there would undergo background checks to ensure they don't have criminal records and aren't involved in any illegal activity. Smoking, alcohol or drugs will not be allowed and curfews will be imposed.

"This isn't some get-you-out-of-the-cold flophouse," Crawford said. "It is meant to build up people and let them know you don't quit life just because you hit a bump in road."

When Crawford bought the abandoned two-story home through auction in May, he said it had been stripped bare, from the copper wiring and plumbing to most of the windows.

Through donations, financial contributions from the congregation and discounts on materials from local businesses, Crawford and about 30 members of his congregation were able to reconstruct the home.

"It's in better condition than my own home," he said.

For information about Hope House, call 313-270-4290.

Contact **JOE ROSSITER** at 313-222-6594 or jrossiter@freepress.com.

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Detroit Free Press

Macomb County news briefs

December 7, 2007

ROSEVILLE: New shelter could aid entire families

A Roseville facility could become the first in the country to offer temporary shelter to entire families, Macomb County officials said.

The Macomb County Planning Commission agreed Tuesday to seek permission by the Board of Commissioners on Dec. 13 to give \$554,000 in county-designated federal funds to Solid Ground.

If approved, Solid Ground expects to open the shelter in a converted American Red Cross office at I-696 and Gratiot sometime next summer.

The shelter would have 14 units and 44 beds. It would provide temporary housing to families, elderly individuals and people with disabilities.

Cuts in Medicare reimbursement to doctors may limit access to health care for seniors

By Fred Gray News-Review Staff Writer

Without congressional action, reimbursement from Medicare to physicians nationwide will be reduced by 10 percent in January, with cuts predicted to rise to 40 percent by 2016.

While that's not good news for physicians, it may be even worse news for seniors and the disabled, whose access to Medicare treatment stands to be curtailed as physicians refuse to accept new patients.

The problem is even more widespread, as physician reimbursement rates for TRICARE, which covers veterans and military families, and many private insurance companies, are tied to Medicare rates.

And an American Medical Association (AMA) survey revealed that 60 percent of physicians nationwide reported that they would have to limit the number of new Medicare patients they treat if next year's cut is put into effect.

Northern Michigan

The problem is particularly acute in Northern Michigan, with its relatively large numbers of seniors and physicians who specialize in treating them.

Some area physicians told the News-Review they will continue to cut costs while trying to maintain services to the community out of a moral commitment. But they say they can do so only so long before continued cuts in reimbursements and increasing costs of operating their practices will force them to make significant changes.

Several single practitioners, who have to take on costs that are more evenly shared in group practice, say they are near the breaking point.

Todd Decker, who practices at Bayside Family Medicine in Petoskey, said Medicare patients have the greatest health care needs and require a great deal of his time, often up to 50 percent of his day.

"It will be really difficult to continue as we have with the cuts in Medicare reimbursement," he said. "I have already had to limit the scope of my practice by the amount of time I can devote to my Medicare patients."

"If we get the 10 percent cut I won't close my doors to my current Medicare patients but I can't take on any more," Decker said.

The AMA says the cut will put physician reimbursement back to what it was in 2001 even while costs of operating their businesses continue to rise.

Dermatologist William Gray (who is the brother of News-Review Staff Writer Fred Gray) of Cheboygan said that with next year's scheduled cut of 10.1 percent and an inevitable rise in expenses, access to health care for seniors in the area could be in jeopardy, despite the best will of physicians.

"Medicaid patients — under the program for low income patients administered by the state — have seen this happen for quite some time," he said.

"Medicare and TRICARE patients need to be informed as to what is going on nationally. Locally, I hope that patients' access to health care will not be affected anytime soon. But with the anticipated cuts, access to health care might well be curtailed for some.

"I feel that everyone needs to be informed so that people have an opportunity to have a say in health care politically, as it will affect all of us in one way or another. The more that we all talk together about health care, the more we can come to a consensus."

AMA recommendations

Ron Davis, a Michigan resident who is president of the national American Medical Association, said physicians in rural areas are often hurt more severely by Medicare cuts than in urban areas because their reimbursement rate may be lower to begin with, and they may be suffering from Medicaid cuts and higher liability insurance premiums.

He said that in addition to limiting access to health care, some physicians in rural communities may not be able to give salary increases to their staff, who end up being overworked and underpaid, or decide to leave, with vacancies going unfilled, and their practice begins a downward spiral.



This weekender gives an in-depth look at the realities that will result if Congress doesn't take action before January. Reimbursement from Medicare to physicians nationwide will be reduced by 10 percent in January, with cuts predicted to rise to 40 percent by 2016.

"There are many different ways the impact may be felt," he said. "Some may simply decide to retire. Around 40 percent of physicians are 50 and older. Many are at a point where they can consider cutting back or retiring early."

He said Michigan has a shortage of physicians, and "we don't want to push them into retirement."

Instead of cutting reimbursement rates, the Medicare Payment Advisory Committee has recommended that Congress increase payment rates by 1.7 percent in 2008 — in line with the estimated practice cost increase.

According to the AMA, the Medicare physician payment update formula is producing disastrous effects. In addition to generating the pending steep pay cuts, the formula:

- Has kept average 2007 Medicare physician payment rates about the same as they were in 2001;
- Prevents physicians from making needed investments in staff and health information technology to support quality measurement;
- Punishes physicians for participating in initiatives that encourage greater use of preventive care in order to reduce hospitalizations;
- Has led to severe shortfalls in Medicare's budget for physician services that have driven Congress to enact short-term interventions with funding methods that have increased both the duration of cuts, as well as the cost of a long-term solution; and
- Hurts access to care for America's military families, as payment rates in the Department of Defense's TRICARE program are tied to Medicare rates.

Congress

Earlier this year the U.S. House passed and Congressman Bart Stupak voted for legislation that would have addressed the problem of Medicare cuts to physician reimbursements for the next two years.

The Senate has not yet passed companion legislation.

Stupak aide Alex Haurek said Stupak "will continue working to prevent Medicare reimbursement cuts so that seniors and Medicare beneficiaries in Northern Michigan can continue to have access to quality health care."

The Senate is reported to be putting together a package that ranges from one-year freeze in Medicare reimbursements to physicians to 2 years of positive updates.

But Shawn Martin, head lobbyist for the American Osteopathic Association, said he believes there is a "strong chance" the 10 percent cut will take effect, with the Senate working in the early part of next year to pass retroactive legislation.

"The Senate has a lot of work to do," Martin said, adding that even if Congress passes legislation it will still have to survive a presidential veto.

Stabenow view

Last year Debbie Stabenow, Michigan's junior U.S. senator, argued that if Congress did not act to undo the 5 percent cutback for 2007, "we will destabilize the Medicare system and put all patients' access to health care at risk. And that is really not an understatement."

She cited an AMA survey that said if the scheduled cuts went into effect 50 percent of doctors will defer purchase of health information technology which would result in savings of hundreds of billions of dollars to the federal government.

"But you cannot tell a physician who is trying to make ends meet to be able to continue to serve people that, 'By the way, we're about to cut your payments coming in, but we want you to buy new hardware and new software and train people and do all of these other things for health information technology, so that the federal government can save dollars.' It doesn't make any sense."

Then, focusing in on rural communities, such as those in her native Northern Michigan, Stabenow said:

"We know that 37 percent of doctors practicing in rural communities will be forced to discontinue Rural Outreach. And 43 percent of physicians will decrease the number of new TRICARE patients that they serve."

Stabenow said that when Congress cuts payments to provide health care, businesses see their health insurance rates go up.

"The private sector ends up paying for all of this, and it does not save money to cut physicians' payments or other Medicare or Medicaid payments," she said.

Cheboygan surgeon

In her speech Stabenow cited Timothy Burandt, who practices surgery in Cheboygan.

She said Burandt wrote her a letter that said:

"In 1982 I graduated from medical school and took an oath to care for all patients in need. As a general surgeon practicing in rural Northern Michigan, I'm committed to caring for all of my neighbors, not just those with insurance. My expenses keep going up as I also have a responsibility to my staff to support them with fair wages and benefits. Without adequate reimbursement, I cannot continue to offer my services to everyone who walks through my door. There simply aren't enough resources. Please don't force me to choose which patients I should care for. I would rather retire early and close my practice."

Then Stabenow said, "I don't want Dr. Burandt to have to close his practice in Cheboygan, Michigan. The families in Cheboygan cannot afford to have him close his practice.

"There is no excuse for us not to act so he doesn't have to do that."

The same scenario is in play for 2008, only the scheduled cuts to Medicare reimbursement are twice as large.

Family practice

John Everett, an osteopathic family practice physician in Indian River, said costs of maintaining a medical practice are increasing twice as fast as Medicare reimbursement, which is scheduled to be cut by 40 percent in the next eight years.

"The only way to deal with that is to cut Medicare benefits and limit access to health care. We'll just end up treating the worst problems people say they are having," Everett said.

He said Medicare patients represent the highest percentage of his practice, with Medicaid patients high as well. He said he will continue to treat his Medicare patients "but will have to figure out how to do it."

"I'll treat them it as long as I can," he said.

Asked what he sees for the future, Everett said: "This will get to a crisis state, and will get the attention of the next group of politicians, who will come in to save the day.

"We need to try to make a sustainable, predictable, equitable Medicare payment to physicians that rewards good health care and good outcomes, and that will help reduce the other part of Medicare (Part D, voluntary prescription drug coverage)."

Everett said Medicare is like a "drowning person."

Asked if he foresees the current crisis ending in a kind of socialized medicine, Everett said: "This IS socialized medicine. The top groups are Medicare and Medicaid, and they are completely governed by the government."

He said the bottom line is that health care costs continue to increase while the government cuts the most rapidly growing segment of the population (Medicare), which is also the most vulnerable.

"It is not looking into the future," Everett said. "We need a responsible program that sustains that population — the best we can afford with the best practices. That's what AMA and the AOA are recommending."

The hospital

Tim Jodway, CFO of Northern Michigan Regional Hospital said cuts in Medicare reimbursements only affect individual physicians, and not hospitals, which come under a different schedule.

He said that in his view, the 10 percent cut in Medicare reimbursements would affect practices differently, depending on the mix of Medicare, Medicaid, insurance, private pay and charity patients.

"I would expect there will be some impact. The physicians will probably be less willing to take lower-paying (Medicaid) and charity patients.

"Even at a 10 percent cut, for a lot of doctors Medicare is paying more than Medicaid, so if they need to make up that difference, the best way for them is to see fewer low-paying patients, and those may not be Medicare."

Medicaid

Gerry Chase, health officer for the four-county Northern District Health Agency, said that while the 10 percent cut in Medicare reimbursement for physicians is a "significant amount of money," rates for Medicaid reimbursement are one-third to 40 percent less.

"It severely impacts the number of providers," Chase said. "Independent practitioners just don't accept Medicaid. It's a serious problem."

Balance Billing

With no permanent fix for Medicare cuts in sight, doctors say it makes sense to pursue a law that would permit "balance billing," which would let them bill patients the difference between reimbursement rates and what it costs to treat patients.

In the context of Medicare the federal government, beginning in the late 1980s, has restricted the ability of physicians to "balance bill" beneficiaries for charges in excess of the copayment and reimbursement amounts approved by Medicare.

Legislative proposals tend to cast the practice in the same light as insurance fraud, with attendant civil fines and licensing sanctions.

The Law

The law provides for Medicare physician payment rates to be updated each year:

— Each year's payment update calculation starts with the Medicare Economic Index or MEI, which is a conservative government index of practice cost inflation.

— The update is then adjusted up or down from MEI based on a national spending target called the Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR).

— The SGR was created by Congress in 1997 as a target rate of growth in Medicare spending for physician services.

— The key factors in setting the SGR are Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, Medicare enrollment, price changes and changes in Medicare benefits or other changes in law.

— If spending exceeds the SGR targets, then annual physician payment updates are less than annual increases in practice cost inflation, even if they produce steep reductions from current payment rates.

AMA President Davis said, about Congress's approach to revising the SGR,: "And this pathetic yearly tourniquet approach to the SGR cuts is a perfect example of management by crisis."

"If physicians across the country are forced out of the Medicare program, and lose trust in the program, they may become wholly resistant to any last-ditch effort by the federal government to respond to the crisis, and to restore the program to 'business as usual,'" he said.

Spiraling Costs - No End in Sight

One possible reason for the reluctance of Congress to deal with the problems head-on, is the studies by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) that report that unchecked, spending for health care will eventually reach unsustainable levels.

In November the CBO released a study titled The Long-Term Outlook for Health Care Spending. The study presents the CBO's federal spending projections on Medicare and Medicaid and health care spending generally over the next 75 years.

The CBO reports that the goal of the study is to examine the implications of continuing current federal law, and finds that federal spending for health care would eventually reach unsustainable levels.

In fact, in the absence of federal law changes, the CBO projections suggest that:

— Total spending on health care would rise from 16 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2007 to 25 percent in 2025, 37 percent in 2050 and 49 percent in 2082.

— Federal spending on Medicare (net beneficiaries' premiums) and Medicaid would rise from 4 percent of GDP in 2007 to 7 percent in 2025, 12 percent in 2050 and 19 percent in 2082.

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Friday, December 7, 2007

Forgotten Harvest reaps success: Nonprofit grows into nation's most efficient food-rescue agency

Shawn D. Lewis / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- Andre Bass will eat fairly well for the next four days, thanks to the loaf of bread, a tomato, a pear, a bag of frozen prepared chicken and a pie he received Thursday at the Jesus Tabernacle of Deliverance Ministries.

"This helps very much," the 49-year-old Detroiter said. "I can make this stretch until I can get another odd job."

The food was courtesy of Forgotten Harvest, a nonprofit organization that rescues perishable and prepared food from restaurants, grocery stores, bakeries and others -- items that normally end up in the garbage -- and quickly redistributes it to the needy through soup kitchens, pantries and shelters.

Forgotten Harvest has grown dramatically since the 1999-2000 fiscal year, when it distributed 1.15 million pounds of food in Metro Detroit. This year Forgotten Harvest will distribute 8.58 million pounds of food -- more than 700,000 pounds per month or 23,833 per day -- making it the nation's third-largest organization of its kind.

"If we could reserve just 5 percent of food from ending up in landfills, there would be no hunger in America," said Executive Director Susan Goodell. "We have the solution. We just need to find the resources to effectively make it work."

Forgotten Harvest depends on an army of more than 375 donors and delivers to 135 agencies, including senior citizen centers, homeless shelters, pantries and soup kitchens -- up from 34 in 2000.

Despite the massive increase, hunger still is a harrowing part of the area's landscape. One in 6 children in the tri-county area lives in poverty, and more than 800,000 residents are at risk of hunger, according to Forgotten Harvest. Gleaners Community Food Bank of Michigan says 62,400 people receive food assistance each week.

To reach them, Forgotten Harvest must fill its donated trucks with diesel fuel, at a cost of \$120,000 a year, maintain them and keep the insurance current.

And while the group has become much more efficient at delivering meals -- it cost 28 cents per pound in 2001 compared with 16 cents today -- that isn't enough to offset the increase in need. Forgotten Harvest spent \$386,100 to deliver meals in 1999-2000, but will spend more than \$1.37 million this year.

The organization needs another \$400,000 to reach its goal in a \$3.6 million capital campaign to buy and renovate a new building. It had outgrown its previous home at Eight Mile and Lahser in Southfield, and was being forced to turn away food because there was no room to sort it. But their most pressing goal is to try to feed the hungry every day. Forgotten Harvest distinguishes itself from a food bank because the perishable foods -- fresh meats, dairy, fruits and vegetables -- must be picked up and delivered quickly.

"We're a rapid rescue just-in-time operation," Goodell said. "We don't have a large warehouse like Gleaners, where they stock their food."

Gleaners Community Food Bank provides surplus donated and low-cost food -- mostly nonperishable canned items -- and related personal care products to people in need in southeast Michigan, and is the third-oldest food bank in the United States.

Forgotten Harvest's greatest growth has come in the suburbs, including Lake Orion, New Baltimore and Belleville.

"When I first came here in 2001, I expected to serve Detroit and Pontiac, and other areas with large groups

in poverty," Goodell said. "But I'm seeing it pop up in communities we never expected to serve."

On a recent pick up and delivery trip, driver Eugene Henry, 65, of Detroit and volunteer Rick Johnston, 59, of Farmington Hills stopped at 14 locations on Metro Detroit's east side and delivered to two agencies.

"It makes me feel good to know I'm helping in some way," said Johnston, who retired as a salesman with Pfizer.

On that day, Johnston and Henry picked up food from four Kroger supermarkets, a Taco Bell, an Olive Garden, Pizza Hut, Fresh Fare market, Variety Foods market and a White Castle. The drivers pull up to the establishment, load up their trucks and have a store manager sign off on the pick up.

After making their rounds, they reverse the process, pulling up to an agency and unloading their bounty.

The driver then has an agency representative sign that they've received the food.

Every loaf of bread or sack of apples is accounted for and entered into a handheld computer, a mobile data tracking device similar to those carried by UPS drivers.

Tommy Felton, manager of the Focus:HOPE food center on Chalmers in Detroit, is grateful for Forgotten Harvest.

"They have been a blessing because they bring items we don't have," he said.

"Basically, all of our food we distribute to senior citizens, pregnant women and mothers with children under 6, is canned goods. So our families consider this a real bonus to add on to the canned goods and other commodities they receive from us."

You can reach Shawn D. Lewis at (248) 647-8825 or slewis@detnews.com.

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Hunger Banquet points out economic divisions

HOMETOWN HEADLINES

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Friday, December 07, 2007

By Holly Klaft

Journal Staff Writer

FLINT - Only a handful dined at tables, ate with utensils and enjoyed a meal of pasta, bread and salad. Most sat on the floor of the Northbank Center Thursday afternoon with only a cupful of rice.

The separation was part of the University of Michigan-Flint's annual Hunger Banquet.

It aimed to demonstrate economic divisions worldwide and show the dimensions of hunger.

Participants randomly drew cards that determined their economic status, and how much food they would be able to eat.

"We want them to get a feel for the reality of hunger in the world and in the U.S.," said Heather Laube, an assistant professor of sociology at UM-Flint. "We're hoping this is going to spur action."

The event included speakers from the Center for Civil Justice, the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan and the Genesee County Land Bank.

Today, UM-Flint students will work with the land bank to help prepare homes for renovation.

- Holly Klaft

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Tax-assistance program helps low-income folks with returns

Friday, December 07, 2007

By **Monetta L. Harr**

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Two years ago, Faith Rueckert thumbed through a list of volunteer activities in the Jackson area. On the last page was tax assistance.

She called that program, but it needed volunteers only in the daytime, and she worked full-time. She was referred to Jerry Hatton with the Community Action Agency, who immediately snatched her up.

"Faith is fired up," Hatton said.

"She is so gung-ho for our program," which recruits volunteers to prepare income taxes for low-income families and the elderly.

More people are needed for the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program, which is entering its sixth year. A free, 15-hour training session takes place in January, and tax preparation begins Feb. 1. Generally, volunteers put in about six hours a week during tax season.

"Regardless if they have an accounting background or not, it doesn't matter," Hatton said about volunteers.

"Probably keyboarding ability and working a mouse is as important as learning the simple tax preparation."

The program is regulated by the IRS, which provides training and software. The Jackson program began with 158 clients and last year helped nearly 1,800 people. The average household received a \$920 tax refund.

There is no charge for the help. To qualify, single people should not earn more than \$19,500. A family of four can't make more than \$38,000.

Besides volunteers, Hatton said the program could use "quality" used computers to supply sites in Jackson, Hillsdale and Lenawee counties.

Hatton said about 30 people have signed up to volunteer in Jackson for the 2008 tax season, nine of them Consumers Energy employees because of Rueckert.

"I love working with numbers, and this is right up my alley," said Rueckert, who is in her 35th year at Consumers Energy.

She is a senior insurance analyst. But more rewarding is working with clients.

"To see some of their faces light up when you tell them they will be getting money back, that's a load lifted off their shoulders," she said.

She volunteers several evenings a week and Saturdays. Instead of tiring her, "it gives me a second wind and keeps me going."

Last year, Rueckert and other Consumers volunteers worked as a team and submitted their volunteer hours to the company. Consumers, in turn, issued a \$400 grant to the Community Action Agency.



THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Agencies help those in need Many hands available to help around county

Friday, December 07, 2007

BY LISA CAROLIN

The Livingston Community News

Livingston County residents are feeling the pain of the struggling Michigan economy.

Unemployment continues to rise as does the demand for services for basic needs like food and shelter. There have been a record number of foreclosures in the county this year, and, according to the directors of many local social service agencies, the local economy still hasn't bottomed out yet.

The good news for area residents is that there are organizations and agencies that can help.

Thrift store opens

If the crowds and donations at the Salvation Army Thrift Store's new location in Genoa Township are any indication, county residents are showing both their generosity to donate and their need to save money on everything from furniture to clothing.

"It's been extremely busy here since our grand opening Nov. 10, and that's a very good thing," says Syndi Reasner, one of the store managers.

"It's not just for poor people to shop here," says Sue Stahl, overall store manger. "The money supports the Salvation Army's rehabilitation programs. Our Livingston County Thrift Store gets about 200 donations a day and as many as 400 donations on a Saturday."

Shoppers like Sarah Koza are willing to travel to the Genoa Township site because of the large selection.

"We live in Holly," says Koza. "There are so many nice things here for the house." Koza, who had been homeless, recently moved into a house that she wants to furnish.

Jean Carpenter from Pinckney comes to the Thrift Store because she likes the prices.

"The clothing items are very reasonable, and I have small kids who outgrow their clothes before they outwear them," says Carpenter. "I usually just come and browse and find things I need."

"The foot traffic at the new location has been way above our expectations," says Jack Kinney, director of operations for the Salvation Army's Southeast Michigan office. "The people in Livingston County have been very benevolent with their donations to the Salvation Army."

Kinney says most of the money earned at the Livingston County location benefits the Livingston County Salvation Army along with merchandise from the store. The rest of the money goes to pay salaries and general costs to run the facility.

"As the tag line in our ad goes, 'whether you shop, donate or both, you help us in doing the most good,'" says Colleen Kinney, director of community relations for the Salvation Army in Southeast Michigan.

A growing need

At the Howell headquarters of the Salvation Army in Livingston County, Captain Derek Rose says the goal

is to raise \$250,000 this Christmas season.

"This year is a little bit worse than last year," says Rose. "Although donations are steady, we are short on volunteers, especially in our adopt-a-family program."

At the Livingston County United Way, Director Nancy Rosso says, "We're experiencing a big increase in demand from most of our agencies. We have more donors who are aware of the struggling economy because everybody knows somebody having difficulty so it's not such a foreign thing, and that's helping us with donations."

Rosso says there is an increase in the amount of poverty in Livingston County and an increase in the number of kids getting reduced-cost lunches at schools in the county.

"At our 2-1-1 number, we have seen an increase in the number of calls from people with basic needs like food, utility, mortgage and rent help," says Rosso. "There are a lot of families being squeezed out of our county."

Rosso says there is a 30 percent increase in people from the county coming to the Department of Human Services for help. "A lot of these people are the new poor and the middle class who don't know how to access help, which gives us new challenges," says Rosso. "I wish we knew when the economy would bottom out."

Gleaners Community Food Bank of Livingston shows evidence of the growing local need for help. According to Manager Erika Karfonta, requests for food from people who live in Livingston County continue to rise. More than 2,000 people receive food from Gleaners Community Food Bank every month. She attributes the increase in food requests to unemployment, and says she's hearing from more people who say they can't afford to continue to live in the county.

Grim job outlook

Unemployment rates have been steadily increasing in Livingston County. According to Bill Sleight, director of Livingston County Michigan Works!, the unemployment rate in the county, which was 5.3 percent in 2006, has increased to 5.7 percent this year.

"We haven't hit bottom yet," says Sleight. "I think it will be another year. The jobs that are out there don't necessarily pay enough for people to support families. We're seeing an increasing number of people who had good careers in manufacturing and need different skills for today's job market."

Sleight says new industries emerging in the county include more health care opportunities, engineering jobs, and warehousing and transportation jobs like truck driving.

"We're encouraging people to start their own businesses," says Sleight. "Community colleges and four-year colleges are focusing more on entrepreneurship, which is a whole different mindset from working at a big corporation."

"We're working with the food service industry and the retail trade industry, where 60 percent of those age 21 and under are employed in this county. We want to make their skills transferable and lead to self-sufficiency rather than dead end jobs."

Children suffer

The economic woes facing many families in Livingston County have a direct impact on children.

According to Donna Gehringer, chairman of Great Start Livingston, "Economic factors that concern adults put additional stress on children who sense when parents are stressed out. Children also lose out on quality time because parents are busier trying to make ends meet."

Ted Westheimer, director of the Livingston County Department of Public Health, says proactive and preventative care for children and adults is more overlooked when times are hard.

Elaine Brown, personal preventive health services director for the health department, wants parents to know that even when they don't have health insurance, children can see physicians as well as dentists through programs at the Department of Public Health.

When it comes to mental health, the stress caused by job loss and money woes is also a big factor.

"There is a lot more environmental stress now because of the economy, with more personal challenges including keeping jobs and health insurance," says Mac Miller, executive director of Community Mental Health. "If someone has a predisposition to depression and you add to that environmental stress, it may be more than they can handle."

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— THE — ANN ARBOR NEWS

Warm the Children makes volunteers 'aware of your own blessings'

News program helps needy families dress children for winter

Friday, December 07, 2007

From News staff reports

Janet Marshall worried a bit when she learned the family she would be shopping with for The Ann Arbor News-Livingston Community News Warm the Children program had seven children.

But she liked the idea of helping that family buy \$90 worth of warm clothes for each child, so she went to the Brighton Meijer store - with no idea she was the one who would come out of the experience with the greatest gift.

Marshall, a Green Oak Township resident, is a member of the Brighton Bookies, nine Brighton-area women in their mid-30s to late 60s. They read books they might not otherwise peruse and have met once a month for the last six years to discuss them.

Marshall read about Warm the Children last year, and called in December to volunteer to shop with a family. Families had already been matched with volunteers by then, so she went on a waiting list for this year.

When she got a postcard from Warm the Children this fall, it was addressed to her in care of the book club.

"So I thought I would ask the club if they wanted to do it," Marshall said.

The eight women who would be in town agreed.

The family she shopped with was a revelation, Marshall said.

"They were so appreciative," she said.

They also were organized.

"I guess you have to be with seven kids," said Marshall, who arrived to find each child with a cart of clothing. "They had gotten there two hours earlier, and had the shopping done. They stretched pennies as far as they could."

Marshall said the children got excited when they found something on clearance. A 10-year-old girl showed off a two-piece outfit she picked out.

"It makes you so aware of your own blessings in life, and how you need to step up and help others," Marshall said.

Sharon Gabe, a member of the Bookies, shopped for a Warm the Children family a few years ago and has since moved to Novi. But she'll return to shop with a family this week.

On that first trip, the look in the mother's eyes as she carefully chose clothing for her children "was a lesson for me," Gabe said.

Bookworm Maryanne Kelly, 69, rehearses a holiday program four days a week with the Hartland Seniors and volunteers with her church. But she still made time to volunteer for Warm the Children.

When Kelly contacted her family to set up the shopping trip, the children's mother was ecstatic, she said.

"(The mother) had gone to the store the previous day to look for boots, and the only boots she could find in their sizes, she couldn't afford," Kelly said. "There are things you do that aren't always for yourself, that make you feel better."

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Social worker had big heart for children

Friday, December 07, 2007

By Greg Chandler

The Grand Rapids Press

ZEELAND -- Nancy Kirkpatrick says she always will remember her father's heart for children.

That was never more evident than during December, when Jim Kirkpatrick would dress up as Santa Claus as part of Zeeland's holiday celebrations.

"He'd walk up to the kids and hand them a piece of candy," Nancy Kirkpatrick said.

Funeral services are Saturday for Mr. Kirkpatrick, who also served on the Zeeland City Council from 1983 to 1995.

He died Tuesday at Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago after suffering complications following insertion of a heart pump. He was 68.

Dorothy Voss, former executive director of the Zeeland Chamber of Commerce, remembers Mr. Kirkpatrick's warm spirit and affection for others.

"He'd talk to anyone; anyone was his friend," Voss said. "He was this open sort of person."

Mr. Kirkpatrick was born in Ludington and lived in Zeeland for the past 40 years with his wife, Linda, and their three daughters.

He worked for the Ottawa County office of the Family Independence Agency, now the Department of Human Services, for 37 years, starting as a child protective services worker and retiring in 1996 as a supervisor.

Mr. Kirkpatrick's passion for children was evident in many of his other activities. He taught Sunday school for 50 years. He was a Boy Scout leader, earning the Silver Beaver award for distinguished service from the Gerald R. Ford Council in 1982.

Besides his wife and daughters, Mr. Kirkpatrick is survived by five grandchildren and two sisters.

Services are planned for 11 a.m. Saturday at Vriesland Reformed Church, 6839 Byron Road.

Burial will be in the Zeeland Cemetery.

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